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The University of Illinois Honor Roll Of High School English 1933-1943

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English departments in Illinois high schools are frequently criticized for the inadequacy of the training they have given their students — an inadequacy that is particularly noticed when these students attend higher institutions of learning. Instructors in college freshman composition courses become irate when a student alibis for his incompetence with such an excuse as, "But I never had to write a 'theme' in high school," or, "But I haven't had any grammar since I was in grade school." On the other hand, college instructors and students are deeply appreciative of the good composition training given by some high schools.

With the idea of discovering just which high schools should be singled out for commendation, the University of Illinois English Department has recorded the grades obtained by freshmen in rhetoric courses and has arranged these grades according to the high school from which these students were graduated. A grade-point average has been computed for each high school, for a ten-year period from 1933-1934 through 1942-1943.

An average for each high school was determined by adding the number of grades earned by its students in Rhetoric 1 and 2 and by dividing this sum into the sum of the grade points earned. Grade points were determined by assigning a numerical value to the semester letter grades, an "A" being valued at five points; a "B," four points; a "C," three points, a "D," two points, and an "E," one point. Exemption from either of the courses by successful completion of proficiency examinations was given the

same value as an "A." "Ab" (absence without excuse from the final examination) was valued as an "E." Withdrawals were not included.

An example of this average calculation follows. York High School of Elmhurst sent 127 students in the ten-year period under investigation; these students received a total of 224 grades in Rhetoric 1 and 2. Exemptions by proficiency examination and final grades of "A" total 24, amounting to 120 grade points; 68 final grades of "B," 272 grade points; 94 final grades of "C," 282 grade points; 31 final grades of "D," 62 grade points; 7 final grades of "E," or "Ab," 7 grade points. The total number of grade points (743), divided by the number of courses taken (224), gives this school an average of 3.317.

The averages obtained in these calculations, like the students who received the grades from which they were computed, reflect the quality of high school instruction. A low average indicates that the high school graduates are a poorly prepared group of students, just as a high average indicates a well-trained group. These generalizations, however, may not apply in all cases. Some high schools do not send a representative group to the University, and thus have lower averages than they justly deserve; conversely, some high schools send a majority of their better students, thus raising their average above what it should be. It is hoped that such injustices balance each other.

A study of these averages led to the compilation of an honor list of Illinois high schools. If their average exceeded 3.000, the University's "C" or average grade, schools were placed on this honor list, which has been divided into three honor rolls, with two sections to each roll. The first honor roll is composed of schools with enrollments over 600, according to 1943 reports. The first section of this roll contains schools that had over 100 representatives in University of Illinois rhetoric classes in the ten-year period; the second section contains those schools sending from 20 to 100 students. Honor Roll II includes schools with enrollments from 250 to 600; the first section lists schools having more than 50 representatives in the survey period; the second section, 20 to 50. Schools with enrollments of less than 250 make up the third honor roll, schools with attendance of more than 40 being placed in the first section, and those with attendance of 20 to 40 in the second section. These particular divisions were selected to make the honor rolls approximately the same length: there are 50 schools on Honor Roll I, 49 on Honor Roll II, and 42 on Honor

Roll III. Averages for schools sending less than 20 students in the ten-year period were not included, as the value of their averages depended too much on an element of chance.

From these honor rolls, the ten best averages have been selected, and the schools having these averages are placed on a "Highest Honors" roll. A predominance of small schools will be noticed, a fact which leads to the generalization that instruction is superior in small schools, possibly because students have the benefit of more careful supervision. It should be noticed, however, that even these schools have only "B—" and "C+" grades. Students on the college level should have a more perfect command of their "mother tongue" than is indicated by even these grades.

It is hoped that such honor rolls can be compiled annually. Such annual honor rolls would give high schools an opportunity to check on their students' achievements, and would permit an indirect check on their teaching staffs and on their curricula. Any marked fluctuation in their standing on such rolls could be noted, and the cause found. It is also hoped that further study can be conducted of the courses of English in the honor schools, as it may be supposed that instruction is superior in them. It has certainly been proved that the majority of the students from these schools have been satisfactorily prepared, according to the standards of the University of Illinois.

HIGHEST HONORS

<i>High School</i>	<i>Average</i>
1. Sumner.....	3.611
2. Waverly.....	3.594
3. Mattoon.....	3.555
4. University, Urbana.....	3.545
5. Harvard.....	3.516
6. Freeport.....	3.506
7. Marion.....	3.484
8. Ogden.....	3.484
9. Mt. Vernon.....	3.483
10. Bensenville.....	3.474

HONOR ROLL I

SCHOOLS WITH ENROLLMENTS OVER 600

SECTION A

Schools sending a yearly average of more than 10 students
in the period from 1933-1934 to 1942-1943

<i>High School</i>	<i>1943 enrollment</i>	<i>No. of students enrolled in Rhet. 1 and 2 at U. of I.</i>	<i>Average</i>
1. Rockford.....	3305	487	3.409
2. York, Elmhurst.....	1647	127	3.317
3. Peoria Central.....	1205	277	3.278
4. Kankakee.....	920	124	3.270
5. Champaign.....	767	1106	3.253
6. Oak Park - River Forest.....	3253	688	3.250
7. Urbana.....	697	937	3.250
8. Elgin.....	1573	148	3.230
9. Granite City.....	1435	105	3.227
10. Streator.....	954	133	3.214
11. East Aurora.....	1344	117	3.210
12. Hyde Park, Chicago.....	4314	729	3.132
13. Evanston.....	2898	270	3.122
14. Danville.....	1770	332	3.110
15. Belleville.....	1523	139	3.093
16. Moline.....	1069	110	3.092
17. East St. Louis.....	1593	152	3.086
18. Springfield.....	1701	340	3.079
19. Decatur.....	2030	248	3.075
20. Glenbard, Glen Ellyn.....	1124	110	3.068
21. Maine Twp., Des Plaines.....	1573	156	3.061
22. Proviso, Maywood.....	3554	215	3.047

SECTION B

Schools sending a yearly average of 2 to 10 students
in period from 1933-1934 to 1942-1943

1. Freeport.....	1010	95	3.506
2. Marion.....	680	35	3.484
3. Mt. Vernon.....	918	97	3.483
4. Canton.....	765	87	3.414
5. Quincy.....	1128	85	3.411
6. Woodruff, Peoria.....	1515	24	3.391
7. Rock Island.....	1357	95	3.266
8. Hinsdale.....	720	46	3.256
9. Manual Training, Peoria.....	1230	53	3.238
10. Collinsville.....	738	64	3.232
11. Edwardsville.....	738	60	3.225
12. Ottawa.....	961	86	3.225
13. Bloomington.....	1100	68	3.221
14. Kewanee.....	675	80	3.200
15. Argo.....	623	22	3.184
16. East Alton - Wood River.....	1038	77	3.174
17. Thornton Twp., Calumet City.....	1007	63	3.134
18. Galesburg.....	965	97	3.131
19. Riverside - Brookfield.....	932	89	3.098
20. Dixon.....	687	84	3.094
21. Lincoln.....	675	50	3.090
22. Leyden, Franklin Park.....	775	29	3.088
23. Alton.....	1139	99	3.081
24. Arlington Heights.....	620	29	3.042
25. Joliet.....	2920	94	3.039
26. Salem.....	635	49	3.038
27. Downers Grove.....	1060	80	3.031
28. Thornton, Harvey.....	2663	65	3.009

HONOR ROLL II

SCHOOLS WITH ENROLLMENTS 250 - 600

SECTION A

Schools sending a yearly average of more than 5 students
in period from 1933-1934 to 1942-1943

<i>High School</i>	<i>1943 enrollment</i>	<i>No. of students enrolled in Rhet. 1 and 2 at U. of I.</i>	<i>Average</i>
1. Mattoon.....	540	105	3.555
2. Lawrenceville.....	575	66	3.196
3. Vandalia.....	347	59	3.168
4. Olney.....	460	100	3.164
5. Pontiac.....	480	104	3.132
6. Fairfield.....	408	71	3.113
7. Hillsboro.....	421	82	3.094
8. Beardstown.....	369	55	3.078
9. Robinson.....	496	61	3.064
10. Watseka.....	258	53	3.052
11. Mt. Carmel.....	436	65	3.045
12. Rantoul.....	303	64	3.037
13. Hoopston.....	322	63	3.027
14. Harter - Stanford, Flora.....	378	85	3.007
15. Clinton.....	442	95	3.006

SECTION B

Schools sending a yearly average of 2 to 5 students
in period from 1933-34 to 1942-43

1. Harvard.....	255	34	3.516
2. Bensenville.....	340	22	3.474
3. Staunton.....	290	25	3.468
4. Rochelle.....	346	30	3.449
5. Geneseo.....	373	38	3.442
6. Rushville.....	297	26	3.357
7. Princeton.....	356	43	3.333
8. Litchfield.....	401	44	3.305
9. Greenville.....	333	28	3.300
10. Shelbyville.....	305	39	3.298
11. St. Charles.....	326	36	3.290
12. Cairo.....	303	36	3.283
13. Sycamore.....	307	26	3.273
14. Wheaton.....	565	39	3.257
15. Woodstock.....	325	39	3.257
16. Nashville.....	287	25	3.250
17. Virden.....	270	24	3.244
18. Westville.....	354	22	3.175
19. Casey.....	315	38	3.173
20. Newton.....	373	36	3.169
21. Batavia.....	319	44	3.149
22. Savanna.....	270	28	3.140
23. Morrison.....	303	34	3.137
24. Chester.....	298	23	3.128
25. Monmouth.....	502	27	3.128
26. Pittsfield.....	320	37	3.121
27. DuQuoin.....	436	40	3.101
28. Dwight.....	267	34	3.101
29. Herrin.....	570	32	3.100
30. Carmi.....	444	29	3.048
31. Lockport.....	500	34	3.037
32. Pana.....	421	49	3.025
33. Murphysboro.....	542	24	3.024
34. Farmington.....	294	33	3.017

HONOR ROLL III

SCHOOLS WITH ENROLLMENTS LESS THAN 250

SECTION A

Schools sending a yearly average of more than 4 students
in period from 1933-34 to 1942-43

<i>High School</i>	<i>1943 enrollment</i>	<i>No. of students enrolled in Rhet. 1 and 2 at U. of I.</i>	<i>Average</i>
1. University, Urbana.....	193	323	3.545
2. Yorkville.....	159	42	3.304
3. Paxton.....	242	70	3.293
4. Monticello.....	209	95	3.159
5. Bement.....	175	62	3.108
6. Mason City.....	150	41	3.098
7. Aledo.....	231	51	3.095
8. Farmer City.....	146	61	3.085
9. Drummer, Gibson City.....	220	60	3.083
10. St. Joseph.....	102	72	3.048
11. Fisher.....	130	65	3.008

SECTION B

Schools sending a yearly average of 2 to 4 students

1. Sumner.....	106	21	3.611
2. Waverly.....	150	20	3.594
3. Ogden.....	84	20	3.484
4. Brown Co., Mt. Sterling.....	161	28	3.468
5. Ashton.....	110	25	3.450
6. Sidell.....	61	21	3.436
7. Atlanta.....	89	20	3.361
8. Roseville.....	157	23	3.349
9. Petersburg.....	223	32	3.346
10. Waterloo.....	237	32	3.285
11. Boone - McHenry, Capron.....	151	20	3.265
12. Mansfield.....	60	24	3.238
13. Armstrong.....	137	21	3.229
14. Barry.....	144	25	3.222
15. Highland.....	170	25	3.218
16. Fairmount.....	85	25	3.190
17. McHenry.....	241	22	3.143
18. Benld.....	191	38	3.131
19. Toulon.....	187	25	3.125
20. Antioch.....	220	31	3.115
21. Winchester.....	168	34	3.090
22. Galva.....	215	33	3.065
23. Geneva.....	214	28	3.065
24. Serena.....	123	23	3.051
25. Henry.....	125	21	3.048
26. Peotone.....	181	30	3.040
27. Havana.....	198	32	3.037
28. Erie.....	148	21	3.029
29. Melvin.....	56	20	3.029
30. Hutsonville.....	156	22	3.027
31. Newman.....	114	21	3.025

The Use of Objective Test Scores In Rhetoric Proficiency Tests At the University of Illinois

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The most serious problems which confront American colleges and universities now and in future years are those dealing with the adequate provision of facilities for millions of persons seeking higher education. Freshman English is the one subject in our institutions of higher learning which will continue to carry the greatest burden mainly because each student is required to complete two semesters of English composition, irrespective of the course he pursues or the college he attends. The University of Illinois enrolled 4,420 students in Freshman Rhetoric in the second semester of 1945-1946, and it is certain that even more will be enrolled in the fall. To assist these freshmen in the fulfillment of their English requirement with the least possible delay and with a minimum of wasted effort by both student and teacher, an efficient method must be employed to group rhetoric students according to their proficiency in English composition.

Over a period of ten years, the Rhetoric Staff at the University of Illinois has experimented with numerous variations of the Rhetoric placement examination. The staff has found that the most satisfactory examination is a combination of a one-hour objective test and a one-hour impromptu theme. The objective portion consists of one hundred items which test vocabulary, spelling, the ability to detect and correct errors in writing, and the ability to select the best of three versions of a sentence. "The objective test is designed so that the student must give unequivocal answers which can be quickly checked either by hand or by machine. Usually there is a correlation between the objective test score and the more subjective evaluations of the impromptu composition."¹ The results of this test determine whether a student is placed in Rhetoric 2, Rhetoric 1, or Rhetoric 0 (a remedial, non-credit course).

The main purpose of the present study is to examine the distribution of 1,562 objective test scores taken from the Rhetoric

¹ Kelley, Cornelia P., and Roberts, Charles W., "Rhetoric Proficiency Tests," *Illinois English Bulletin*, March, 1944, p. 2.

placement examination given in March, 1946. This paper proposes to clarify the use of an objective test and its importance in determining the placement of freshmen enrolling in the freshman composition course.

PART I

The present study is based on a total of 1,562 representative students who took the same Rhetoric 1 placement test in March, 1946. Sixty-two of the students were exempted from taking Rhetoric 1; 1,000 students were required to take Rhetoric 1; and 500 students were placed in Rhetoric 0. In other words, thirty-two per cent of the tested students were not prepared to begin the Rhetoric 1 course of study; sixty-four per cent were found to have the required qualifications to begin Rhetoric 1; and only four per cent were considered proficient enough to be exempted from Rhetoric 1.

TABLE 1

<i>Placement</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
Exempt	62	4.0	86.0	86.0
Rhet. 1.....	1000	64.0	76.4	75.0
Rhet. 0.....	500	32.0	63.4	64.0

TABLE 2

<i>Exempt Grades</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
A (90-100).....	15	24.2	92.9	93.0
B (80- 89).....	39	62.9	85.3	86.0
C (70- 79).....	8	12.9	77.0	78.5

TABLE 3

<i>Rhet. 1 Grades</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
A (90-100).....	14	1.4	91.4	91.0
B (80- 89).....	235	23.5	83.0	83.0
C (70- 79).....	506	50.6	74.8	75.0
D (60- 69).....	213	21.3	66.0	66.0
E (50- 59).....	30	3.0	56.8	58.0
(40- 49).....	2	.2	44.5	....

TABLE 4

<i>Rhet. 0 Grades</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
A.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
B (80-89).....	5	1.0	82.6	82.0
C (70-79).....	105	21.0	73.6	73.0
D (60-69).....	234	46.8	64.6	65.0
E (50-59).....	127	25.4	55.7	56.0
(40-49).....	25	5.0	45.6	46.0
(30-39).....	4	.8	37.3	38.0

As shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4, the scores of the exempt students ranged from 72 to 99; the scores of the students placed in Rhetoric 1 ranged from 41 to 94; and the scores of the students placed in Rhetoric 0 ranged from 34 to 85. The most outstanding fact to be observed in Table 1 is that there is a difference of approximately ten points between the test means of the three different classifications. In other words, the three levels of students might be interpreted this way: exempt students — B (above average), Rhetoric 1 students — C (average), and Rhetoric 0 students — D (below average). The mean score for the entire 1,562 papers was 72.6; consequently, the average student taking the placement test could be expected to stand slightly below the fixed mean of the Rhetoric 1 group in Table 3.

A closer examination of Tables 2 and 3 shows that no grade in the exempt group was below 73 and that only two grades in the Rhetoric 1 classification were below 50. Students who make a grade above 70% on the proficiency test are seriously considered for exemption, while those with grades below 50% are seriously considered for Rhetoric 0 classification.² At first this statement may seem inconsistent, because Table 4 shows that 22% of the students placed in Rhetoric 0 received grades that were both above 50 and above the test mean for Rhetoric 0. The evaluation of the impromptu theme is the deciding factor here. A close study of the compositions written by these 110 students showed the examiners that although the students were able to recognize and correct mistakes on the objective test, they did not have the ability to carry this skill over to their own writing. Initial classification of students must be made quickly by committees grading papers on the day preceding freshman registration. Any student who reveals during the first three weeks of Rhetoric 0 that he is quali-

² Kelley and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

fied for Rhetoric 1 is transferred at the end of that time. This provision has been made in order to rectify any mistakes made in grading the placement test.

As the objective test is now constructed, an efficient placement of freshmen in rhetoric cannot be achieved unless the combination of the objective test and the impromptu composition is used.

PART II

Of 1,000 representative students who were placed in Rhetoric 1 in March, 1946, 120 had taken and had failed the Rhetoric 1 placement test which was given in October, 1945; as a result of this, they were placed in Rhetoric 0. After a semester in the remedial course, these students were given a final examination which was similar to the placement test. The final grades in Rhetoric 0 were based on the caliber of the students' work, plus the amount of improvement he had made during the course. When these same students registered for Rhetoric 1 in March, 1946 (approximately three weeks after they had taken the Rhetoric 0 final test), they were asked to take the proficiency test for Rhetoric 1 again. The following tabulations will show the results of the three different objective tests which these 120 students took before they entered Rhetoric 1 in March, 1945.

TABLE 5

<i>120 Rhet. 0 Grades</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>	<i>S. D.</i>
First Placement Test—10/45.....	61.2	61.5	8.5
Final Obj. Grade in Rhet. 0.....	69.7	70.0	8.0
Final Grade in Rhet. 0.....	C	C	....
Placement Test for Rhet. 1—3/46....	70.2	71.0	7.0

TABLE 6

<i>Original Placement Test—10/45</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
A.....	..	...	...	...
B (80-89).....	4	3.3	84.0	85.0
C (70-79).....	12	10.0	71.6	71.5
D (60-69).....	55	45.8	63.7	63.0
E (50-59).....	43	35.8	55.3	56.0
(40-49).....	5	4.2	46.4	46.0
(30-39).....	1	.8	39.0	....

TABLE 7

<i>Final Obj. Test Grades in Rhet. 0</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
A (90-99).....	2	1.7	94.0	....
B (80-89).....	13	10.8	83.0	83.0
C (70-79).....	46	38.3	74.0	73.0
D (60-69).....	44	36.7	65.0	65.0
E (50-59).....	14	11.7	55.9	56.0
(40-49).....	1	.8	48.0	....

TABLE 8

<i>Final Grades in Rhet. 0</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
A.....	..	....
B.....	10	8.3
C.....	57	47.5
D.....	48	40.0
E.....	5	4.2

TABLE 9

<i>Placement Test—3/46</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Mdn. Score</i>
A.....	..	....	....	....
B (80-89).....	11	9.2	82.3	82.0
C (70-79).....	56	46.7	74.0	73.5
D (60-69).....	46	38.3	65.1	65.5
E (50-59).....	7	5.8	54.3	53.0

The distributions of the scores for the three tests are as follows: 39 to 86 for the original placement test, 48 to 97 for the final objective test scores in Rhetoric 0, and 51 to 84 for the placement test in Rhetoric 1 in March, 1946. The data in Tables 5, 6, 7, and 9 make clear that there is a decided improvement in the students' score after they have taken Rhetoric 0. The greatest improvement is shown between the first placement test in October, 1945, and the last one in March, 1946. As noted in Table 5, there is an increase of nine points in the total test means of the two groups. Also, as seen in Table 9, no student received a score below 50 in the final placement test, whereas, in the original test, the scores reached a low of 39. The standard deviation in the former is 1.5 points lower than the standard deviation in the latter. This

smaller value denotes a closer grouping of the scores about the mean.

The difference between the means of the final test taken in Rhetoric 0 and the proficiency test for Rhetoric 1 is not great enough to mention, other than there is a .5 increase in the latter case. This may be attributed to the fact that the students become familiar with the testing procedure.

It may be seen from Table 8 that 5 of 120 students received a failing grade in Rhetoric 0; despite this, they took the Rhetoric 1 proficiency test (within a few weeks after their failure), made a satisfactory grade, and were placed in Rhetoric 1. The Rhetoric Staff permits students to do this, but advises students that a semester should elapse before they take another proficiency test.

The main thing to notice in Table 8 is that the average grade for Rhetoric 0 students is "C." Only eight per cent of the grades were above "B," and the mean for the final placement test (even after they were subjected to the remedial course) is only seventy per cent — 6.2 points below the average of the students entering Rhetoric 1 directly. For further proof that the students who have had Rhetoric 0 still remain in the lower half of the Rhetoric 1 grades, compare the data in Tables 3 and 9. Of the two hundred and thirty-five "B" students in the Rhetoric 1 grades, only eleven of the former Rhetoric 0 students are represented; of the thirty-two "E" students, seven of them had taken the remedial course. When the mean of the grades classified in Rhetoric 1 is averaged again — this time minus the 120 grades of the former Rhetoric 0 students — the mean of the Rhetoric 1 scores increases to 77.2. The explanation for this may be that the majority of students placed in Rhetoric 0 are handicapped because their natural mental endowment is low. Therefore, the instructor cannot expect a high quality of achievement where mental ability of high order is not present. Perhaps careful diagnosis of the individual student's background, study habits, and physical defects would help to eliminate a few of his difficulties, but, under the present system, rhetoric teachers do not have the time to diagnose carefully the potential ability of each student. Consequently, the average of Rhetoric 0 students probably will remain low.

The Rhetoric Staff at the University of Illinois regards the present objective test as reliable, valid, and easy to administer, interpret, and score. However, it should be stressed again that the objective test alone is not sufficient; the impromptu composition must also be taken into consideration to maintain an efficient and equitable method of placing students.

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